

*Journey through America*  
(an excerpt)

WOLFGANG KOEPPEN

Translated by MICHAEL KIMMAGE

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*Translator's Introduction*

Wolfgang Koeppen is a great German writer whose fame does not extend far beyond Germany. Often referred to as a major German novelist of the postwar period, Koeppen was a journalist and a writer of fiction long before the Second World War. He was born in 1906. Still, he is best known for a trio of postwar novels published in the early years of the Federal Republic: *Pigeons on the Grass* (1951), *The Greenhouse* (1953), and *Death in Rome* (1954). These were novels of social criticism, their author preoccupied with an enduring German authoritarianism. Through them Koeppen helped import an Anglo-American modernist tonality into German literature. The title of *Pigeons in the Grass* was taken from Gertrude Stein, the novel a Joycean chronicle of a day in the life of postwar Munich. One of its characters is Odysseus Cotton, an African American GI, the first such figure in German literature. Though Koeppen never lived in the United States, he was rigorously engaged with the question of America at just the moment West Germany was shedding its Nazi past and joining its destiny to the American military occupation. A self-conscious European, Koeppen was attuned to the growing presence of America—American politics, American culture—in Europe.

Koeppen traveled to America in 1958, a guest of the State Department and on assignment for the *Süddeutsche Rundfunk*, a German radio station. He returned to Germany with material for several radio broadcasts, which he turned into a book, *Amerikafahrt*, or *Journey through America*, published in 1959. By going to America Koeppen was doing the expected. He was a European intellectual

making the requisite pilgrimage to the future, and even his itinerary was stereotypical: New York; Washington, DC; New Orleans; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Boston; Chicago; etc. The book he wrote, however, is unique. It is a book of images, conveyed in the language of high modernism, a lyrical-analytical reckoning with the American scene. To take only two examples: *Journey through America* begins with images of American soldiers on European soil, listing the countless ways this (geopolitical) America is felt in Europe and framing the book as a voyage to a country in which Koeppen is already living. The book concludes with a complicated image. Koeppen stands in a Jewish cemetery in Queens, shortly before his return to Europe, staring at the United Nations building embedded in the Manhattan skyline. The suggestion of racial atrocity haunts the promise of postwar peace, uniting "America" and "Europe" into a single emotion.

*Journey through America* has no thesis statement. The author himself is visible, without being much of a subject. Nothing of note happens to Koeppen in America, and he is freed by his narrative insignificance to be an impressionist painter, working along the surface of things. Beneath this gorgeous surface lies a finely wrought thematic structure. America is a place of vast loneliness and a place where the world's races mingle into robust fellowship. America has realized the Enlightenment in the majesty of its citizenship, in its dedication to learning, in its tolerance, and this same America is home to brutal racial segregation and to bitter poverty. America has unspoiled nature of a kind that does not exist in Europe, and Americans' love of technology is alienating and destructive. To encounter these contradictory claims in *Journey through America* is to find answers to de Tocqueville's questions spelled out by a disciple of Kafka and Dos Passos, the plenitude of fiction exploited to expand the genre of travel writing. Koeppen's journey resembles the well-known German literary journey, Goethe's trip to Italy between 1786 and 1788, a philosophical and poetic quest as well as a search for renewal for the author and for the author's exhausted Germany.

The *Journey through America* passage excerpted here comes from the middle of the book. It recounts Koeppen's visit to Los

Angeles, his impressions of the city, of Hollywood, of the LA beaches and the Beat poets. It begins with the improbably blue sky and concludes with a reference to Kafka, Koeppen's guide to America. It was Kafka, Koeppen writes earlier on in the book, who "never reached America but who nevertheless had the truest dream of America." The persistent European texts and subtexts behind America, visible to Koeppen even in a city as American as Los Angeles, are a key to the book as a whole. The complete translation is due out with Berghahn Books in August 2012.

M. K.

THE SKY WAS IMPROBABLE, bluer than the sky over Frederick II's Palermo, it was higher than the Athenian sky in the golden age and more pure than the sky of the shepherds and the three kings from the East, it was the stainless expensive sky of the film operators, its ether was the domed horizon of a massive stage, and the sun made up the lights, which illuminated the decoration, the wonderful city of Los Angeles, the true home of the angels.

The angels live in paradise, as is well known, and Los Angeles is an American paradise, it is the Garden of Eden in its last perfection.

Los Angeles, which is not a city but a monstrously spread out area of settlement with cities, beaches, gardens, valleys, mountains, is the American future, a place of promising. Los Angeles offers room, Los Angeles warms, Los Angeles has palms and fruit at the ready, giving as a gift dreams of Hawaii, of the happy island of Bali and of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Los Angeles is the place where everyone in the United States, the peoples of Asia and Mexico aspire to be. Los Angeles is the city where the rich are gods, where the poor become rich, where the industrious relax, and the old try to buy immortality, it is the happy community, in which the statistically average and model families already own two cars, two televisions, two refrigerators, and here all blessings are doubled, if not tripled.

I stood before the administrative building of a well-known oil company, and it was the spitting image of the Ghent altar, made by the Van Eyck brothers, grown here to the height of a skyscraper. Not without emotion I observed the dividend-carrying holy shrine. Golden lines pressed upward with gothic piety, leading up to the roof, which was crowned by a little Eiffel Tower, itself holding up a globe; below in the display windows, on street level, an exhortation to passersby, a supersonic hunter flew by with the company fuel, faster than the others, into the beyond.

In Los Angeles one loved above all to dress things up. The train station was built like a Spanish church, churches conformed to the style of businesses, a restaurant had been decorated as the historic site of Golgotha, cinemas invited customers in the form of Chinese



temples, and one of the area's famous cemeteries was an expanded vocational school for the dead.

My path led me to a bible institute, and the building appealed to me because it was exactly like the Excelsior Hotel that Thomas Mann had described in Venice. The institute was Moorish nineteenth century with minarets and towers for the edification of secret business councils, and above its entrance was written in iron letters, *Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.*

I soon noticed a "Church of the Open Door," and its nave was a mussel-shaped room in a giant modern cinema set up by an architect who was both avant-garde and business savvy; where one expected to see the Almighty; on the film stage one was staring at a map of the world that took up an entire wall, on which white and red bulbs marked the globe like strategic points. Only three rather lonely lights were burning in Europe, while dark Africa was lit up by many little red lamps. Before this map, worthy of a general staff, a man stood, spoke, preached. He looked and was dressed like the manager of a big company, an extremely successful general director, a public relations fox, who presented himself as unaffected, a good guy, although with every natural and studied gesture, with every spontaneous-sounding and painstakingly considered word one could see through to the monstrous power, perhaps the power of heaven itself, that he was representing.

Whom was he influencing, whom persuading, whom did he recruit, baptize, confirm, whom did he save from damnation, to whom did he give last rites, whom did he send on into eternal life?

On the beautifully cared for, laboriously polished pews in the back of an otherwise empty room sat a pair of young people, whom I took for business students during a break from school. The students talked softly with each other, though not respectfully, and they ate bananas. It was unknowable whether they had come to the "Church of the Open Door" to listen to the smart preacher or to eat bananas.

Finally a big organ with all of Wurlitzer's sonic jokes boomed praise for the almighty God. The pious efficient man was swallowed before our eyes, lowered down as if by the maw of hell. The white

and red bulbs on the world map went out, and all the earth lay in the same darkness.

A shiny, elegant, flourishing store in this area of churches and businesses specialized in vitamin concoctions; despite the streaming sun, despite the cloudless blue sky, everyone seemed to need the life-giving pills. Customers crowded around as if before a healing well, as if before the shrine of Asclepius, and they got just enough water to wash down their pharmaceutical boosters.

The Broadway of Los Angeles is a street of warehouses. On Sunday afternoon it was occupied by a thick pressing mass, which wanted to spend its money. I stayed standing on a corner for a long time; I lingered in order to be amazed. I was aroused, I got excited; I was astounded by the beautiful, the free, the proud people, whose colorful, joyful show was passing me by.

The Broadway of Los Angeles was no shopping street for the rich, it belonged to the people, I had never before seen such a people, whites of all shadings, Negroes light and dark, Asians yellow and brown, Filipinos, Mexicans, Latin Americans, Indians, old peoples, a new people, which looked beautiful, proud, uninhibited, free, stepping straight. The eternal sunshine, the warm air, which wasn't damp, the desire for mixing and perhaps the forefathers' efforts to reach these happy coasts as well, had brought forth a new race, which was only to be recognized still as black, yellow, or white in origin, but no longer distinguished from one another in their life's joy; they had all grown bigger, more straight, more self-confident than their ancestors in the distant, forgotten, or damned homeland, and what most amazed and delighted me was that they tolerated one another, they looked at each other in friendship.

The Broadway of Los Angeles was no street for prejudices, the crowd made no room for arrogance, the sky made a gift of joy.

Bananas grew in front of my hotel in the middle of the city, and a kind of Hyde Park life arrayed itself on Pershing Square beneath the broad, meaty leaves of the banana trees.

Wild orators spoke to little gatherings, reformers strolled hopefully up to passersby, preachers of all skin colors stood, overcome by

the Holy Ghost, on stepladders carried there laboriously they made rhetorical gestures, whispered urgently, they shouted themselves hoarse, but they all wanted the good, they were striving for holiness, teaching reconciliation, tolerance, and friendliness.

In a truly moving manner Negro men and women pressed bibles to themselves like their most precious treasure; they displayed the text in a somewhat surprising way but always in a way one could love, and in their black eagerness, the holy book lifted to their breasts, they often resembled icons from the old Byzantine church.

Vagrants were gathered around these speakers and prophets on Los Angeles's Pershing Square. To me it seemed that they had found their way to the banana trees of the angels' city from all the states of America, even from the whole world. They were peaceful, friendly people, tanned by sun and wind, marked by floods of rain and by the endless country roads. Some of them seemed like old, though not grown-up, German *Wandervögel*; they dressed themselves in the Steglitz style of 1900, going in jungle shirts, in short pants and in sandals, strumming guitars, they did not beg, they only took donations, they hummed songs, fifty years old and older, songs from *Zupfgeigenhansl* [the *Wandervögel* song book].

Their faces were amiable, at the same time deeply sad and obstinate after many blows from life. They were themselves white-haired, disappointed children, and there was something touching about them.

These poor and pure, who may have read too much Karl May or Hans Blüher in their youth, had their own bars and shelters among other impoverished folk, less spiritually pure, in the slums of Los Angeles, extensive like the city itself, in a street where those who hadn't found paradise in Los Angeles came to drink in very dark bars barricaded against the sun.

Here one got Mexican food, hot-as-hell chili con carne served with red beans. I ate the dish at a bar, which belonged to an old, deformed Japanese, for whom his young blond waitress had developed such a passion that she had to stare at him intently, and in her otherworldly state she confused people's orders. The Japanese man,

unpleasantly, in a dollar-hunting way, returned this limitless love with caustic talk, his English words sounding like they had been emitted from an enraged parrot, while a few Negroes in overalls, a Central American with a scarred face, and a dead-tired vagrant, who, I gathered, had once been a professor at a German university, indifferently gulped down their red pepper with cheap liquor.

There in a dirty street, in doorless shops—open day and night, with well-proportioned exhibition rooms equipped with viewing walls—a rich assortment of pornographic newspapers and postcards were once again for sale, and these banal erotic dreams of the exposed next-door neighbor found their dreamy viewers and buyers, again it astounded me, even in Los Angeles, this free-living city, as in all of big America.

In the morning, fog and a light humidity pressed down on the city, by afternoon the sun was shining, the air was clear and pure, the evening brought the most pleasant cool, and the night glittered with strong, splendid stars in the ever cloudless sky.

The center of Los Angeles is not Los Angeles, however. Los Angeles is a province, a veritable city province and positioned all across the compass.

In this expansive area anyone who does not have his own car, who has none to rent, is as good as exiled; even the praiseworthy community bus company cannot save him. The company's transportation map looks like the sewing pattern supplement of a housewife's newspaper, confusing, with lines crossing and running into each other, stretches of hundred-kilometer distances, but between the black dashes lie expansive white fields, unreachable areas for the carless, for those expelled from society.

It so happened to me that after my arrival in Los Angeles, not knowing its topography, I accepted a telephone invitation to dinner and then drove through the landscape in a taxi for over an hour and for twenty dollars. Through a wondrous landscape. With six lanes in every direction, the highways swing like giant seesaws through an area of wasted space, human habitation, and always more sublime, always more decorative nature. The Harbor Freeway seemed to be

hung on the snow-covered Sierra Madre Mountains. US highway number 66 went through a real paradise; orange trees bent over it with their heavy fruit, and the floral magnificence of a tropical garden shimmered in transports of color.

And now seen for the first time! The sky, the waves, the beach, the high coast with its palms, its pepper trees, its carpets of flowers, even the lawns had such a strong coloration that I thought I was seeing light blue, true green, real red, and a truly white beach for the first time.

The sea fulfilled all dreams of a still ocean, and looking directly across to China, to Japan, and to India held a strange fascination for me.

On these shores America had already been wedded with Asia, and it occurred to me as I stood on this coast, when I saw the fast airplanes in the air, the great ships on the distant horizon, that I was here at a new Mediterranean, before the natural cradle of a great new culture, that I was going along the edges of an immense field of political power, in which the future of humanity might be decided, a future of the finest development or of eternal damnation, sure enough, and I asked myself whether this future might already have begun.

In the water, on the beach, on the paths, the broad boulevards, the gardens and parks were teeming with people, with people who had carried their heredity from Europe, from Asia, from Africa to these friendly coasts, with people who called themselves Americans though they were different from the Americans of the other United States.

Everywhere they were going around naked, their purpose seemed to be a game and music their continuous accompaniment, which they carried with them in small handy little bags; they had solved a problem, the problem of being in the city and being outdoors, of being workers and of being at leisure. The question of equality and of freedom was solved here in a happy manner. No beach was fenced in or closed off, there was only the entrance cost to be paid, there were no reservations for hotel guests, not a single

tour group fell on happiness like a swarm of locusts, here humanity should sun itself, the poorest could come and go as they liked. Little boats thronged near the shore, and in them were not fishermen, obligated to work hard, but people who had cast their nets for fun, into which the sea's inhabitants willingly leapt, as in some dreamland. Fishermen clustered at the Santa Monica pier beneath a sun that was warming but not burning. I saw Negroes, Europeans, Americans, Asians, I saw men, women, children, elderly, serious and comical and cheerfully tragic faces. They stood peacefully in a friendly proximity to one another, and the ocean was benevolent, it had a reward for everyone, each found his own fish; sea crabs, starfish, and Pacific Coast spiders were raised up into a light that must have been horrifying to them, and the most unfortunate were already cooking, the seafood turning a kingly purple in big vats before the pier's food stands and restaurants.

What diligence had been conceived to entertain these people, to amuse them, to stimulate their desire, to take from them the pressing burden of time and loneliness! Everywhere great buildings tempted people to walk in the shade for a change, to play sports, to go bowling, bowling tournaments had been arranged, a wide concrete space was there for people to go on roller skates in their bathing suits, there was an ornate carousel, and on its white foamy-maned, smooth wooden horses, the prettiest girls imaginable bobbed up and down.

Wrestlers trained their oiled bodies beneath the sun in pure, fine sand; strong men lifted up balls and bars, advertising their muscles in the suggestive manner of gigolos. A red-haired, voluptuous girl practiced acrobatic dance moves on the heroically majestic breast of an equatorial African, and when, because of exertion and exuberance, she gulped the air, she showed her older sister her tongue, like a snake, strawberry red beneath a lather of chewing gum.

Music floated over this earthly paradisiacal world, such as no Gulliver had ever seen on his travels. The area that the eye and ear could comprehend was drenched with musical tones. Jazz flashed out



from little bags, jazz flew out from the flamingly colorful jukeboxes, which stood everywhere and were gladly used. Then, when the sun first sank into the west, into the sea's hazy perimeter, into its waves at sunset, the drumming began.

The drumming spelled out taps for the old Europe, it seemed to me, and nowhere in the New World was Europe farther away. Negroes had gathered on the beach in the hundreds, they had brought high drums, and under the black, talkative, magical hands, free, wild rhythms were born on the stretched skin, the old powerful voices of voodoo. And dark dancers stood up and listened to the compelling voices and danced barefoot in the sand, and suntanned girls raised themselves up and succumbed to the spell of the drumming and the lithe dancers, and I saw what I had missed in New Orleans, the slave rebellion, almost the Negro heaven.

From that wondrous place, Santa Monica Beach, Ocean Park, a little trolley went on soft rubber wheels, alongside the beach and the sunset, to an even more wondrous place, to Venice, and there Europe and the devil had crept into heaven. In Venice they didn't lie out in the sun, in Venice they were reflective, in Venice they didn't cultivate and strengthen the body, in Venice they neglected the body, they ignored it in the medieval manner. In Venice they weren't friendly, they didn't smile; in Venice they were furious. They also played jazz in Venice, but not because they found it fun or exciting; in Venice the music was something sacred, then it was an expression of revolt, and finally it was an occasion to ponder the architecture of the fugue and the mathematics of world destruction. Every trombonist in Venice was Kierkegaard, who had been thrown existentially, satirically into this hell and was crying out from it.

For Venice was a hell, sprung from the brain of a real estate speculator who was probably crazy, who wanted to build an imitation Venice, with palaces and canals, with a St. Mark's Place and a Doge's Palace and a Campanile, and everything from cloth, lath, and plaster, a postcard-true look of the beautiful model. The speculator failed, went bankrupt, left behind ruins of yesterday, half finished, buildings that had no renters and graves in which water and garbage festered.



These vaults of impotent romanticism and dead rebirth, which stayed cool and damp even in California's warm climate, now attracted the tired or the defeated generation, *the beat generation*, as they called themselves after their testament, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, a bohemia with two dead gods, Charlie Parker, who died of morphine, and James Dean, who died in a car crash. They hadn't grown up in Venice, they didn't dress themselves up, they had renounced the State Department, the Pentagon, the refrigerator, the television, and Hollywood once and for all, and so the movie business was just about to discover them. But film and fame were neither here nor there, they too, these tired figures, were America, they proved that also in the New World, as in the Old, usually at exactly their great cultural moments, there were people who could renounce the Madison Avenue ad agent's desk chair or the well-paid positions, which provided for old age and for widows, in television, in the universities, in schools, and in the Washington bureaucracies, people who were ready for spiritual rebellion and for the negation of conformist thinking or not-thinking, not dissolute, not satisfied, but ascetic and hungry for life. Venice was soil, nourishment for trees, from which the institutions and, as it goes, the new conformity will eventually pick their fruit. In a room behind broken windowpanes or with windows boarded up with wood, in ruins as if after an earthquake that had destroyed this imitation of reality in movie-making land, they sat gloomy, disheveled, and dirty with their slender beer bottles and their recorded jazz that sounded like strict old church music, perhaps it would have delighted their ancestors, the Puritans.

When the door to this hell of enraged hermits and nihilistic revolutionaries was opened, one looked, as far as the eye could see, out to a fence, behind which a new speculator, probably no less crazy than the first, had erected a monstrous Luna Park.

And then there was another Venice, less hell-dark but also terrible, inhabiting a square that was really almost Italian, not the splendor of Venice, but with a Southern poverty and Wailing Wall grief, living in small hot guest houses and cafeterias reeking of fat, on many of their cloudy windowpanes sickly looking Hebrew letters

were written. They were Jews from Europe, who had saved themselves from the raving monster by going as far west as they could, stranding themselves forever on the Pacific Ocean, old people, teary women, beaten-down men, dreaming of Breslau, of the Hausvogteiplatz, of the Prague old town, of their old Vienna neighborhood. They sat timidly, shriveled by fate, reflecting each other's sorrow on little marble tables and on marble benches. The country's friendly sun was shining on them, but I feared that it did not warm these refugees, who also didn't see its light.

Hollywood Boulevard, Sunset Boulevard, Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills, the villas belonging to those shadows on the screen, mile-long, strangely senseless-seeming street cars, highways bravely crossing over each other and coupling on the open fields, cement visions of a future architecture, parkways that reminded me of the Riviera and of Sochi's Black Sea coast, then the walled-in sites of the dream factories, the Hollywood strip with the most expensive restaurants in the world, the bars for the extras smelling of ketchup and powder and the girls who've run away from all parts of the earth to make an American movie, all this big and famous Hollywood is, when you have a car, the most boring place in Los Angeles and, when you go by foot, the most stressful. Again and again I wandered through unbuilt areas and past uninhabited gardens. The land seemed cheap, it seemed to be wasted there, but it cost a great deal. Many buildings were tall, they were small skyscrapers, soaring bravely into the blue sky, but even on the grand boulevards one-story, barrack-like buildings, looking like their owners had run out of money for the tower of Babel, stood next to the skyscrapers.

In the daytime, more than anyone I observed older women in the Hollywood streets, not very well-off representatives of the middle class with correspondingly modest flowerbed hats. With wishful, disapproving looks, the women scrutinized the fashion store displays, which offered skillfully cut copies of Parisian tailoring, patterns sewed so one could be naked in them and so no one could be noticed. The women didn't buy the refined dresses, and I have no idea who bought them. In the empty stores, between racks and

mirrors, waited women who looked like hunted but still prosperous Russian duchesses, or like actresses who had once appeared with Sarah Bernhardt.

The flowerbed women then turned their attention to the display cases of the many photographers who made their living in Hollywood by producing so-called artists' postcards for people wanting to be in movies and considering themselves lucky to have arrived in these vanity cases. One was opposed to such ambitious stupidity, but the women may not have seen this as stupidity, they seemed strangely to like these compulsively smiling provincial faces, which would never light up the movie-theater night. One clever photographer had specialized in portraying children as little stars, and the mothers brought them with evident desire and hope, and truly the flowerbed women were charmed by the likeness of such youthful affectation.

In almost every building there was an institute offering dancing, acting, and singing lessons, and one of the brilliant displays promised an especially successful enterprise, to teach charm, to improve one's natural posture, and to bring underdeveloped aspects of female attraction to full flower. I saw the pictures of the charm students in the entryway, as they had first come to the beauty master, poor and without any of Venus's attributes, wallflowers from some Main Street, and then one got a look at them, hardly transformed to the impartial eye, equipped with all attractions that make them desirable and irresistible in the institute's estimation, with more studied posture, raised breast, and practiced charm, though before and after as deformed as saved, those on display smiling with the same ambitious and striving stupidity. There were a dozen beautiful girls on all the Los Angeles beaches, and on Hollywood Boulevard those who had come up short wanted their revenge and they wanted to sit in the light.

The life of those actually crowned with cinematic fame, the fairy-tale existence of the world-famous shadows seemed to play itself out entirely in automobiles so big that one could sleep in them, live in them, resolve problems, and even make love perhaps.

In the fortresses of their mythic popularity, the chosen and the world-famous drove by Grauman's Chinese theater, whose Chinese

funhouse rococo appealingly recalled the early days of movie making, in front of it the idolatry of flickering figures has been cast and set in concrete, and one can admire the footsteps, the sweet hands, the meaningful script, and the bravely curving signatures of the great cinestars preserved for eternity, united with such earth-shattering expressions, exclamations, and dedications as *Love to you all*, though I sought out and failed to find among all the beloved concrete squares, which looked like thespians' grave stones, the characteristic name, saying, hands and feet of the singular geniuses who had created the medium of film; Charlie Chaplin had not been memorialized in stone, perhaps he had not loved everyone and Mr. Grauman enough to be remembered, and they wouldn't have to drive past him, the new dream figures who no longer make one laugh, they raced to the valley in their hundred-horsepower cars, to look after their rights and their bank accounts, driving undeterred and untempted past those eating, drinking, and sinning stations holy to the readers of film magazines, the Brown Derby, Romanoff, La Rue, Scandia, which from the outside all looked like the mess halls of some poor postwar era, like barracks, though inside they were laid out with maximum opulence, traps for the children of Texas oil millionaires and managers' widows, the lights led through the door of the entryway, greeting its public with glowing porcelain crowns. Here one could speak with the boss about money and about one's share, establish the percentage of one's earnings, creaming off the best, sticking it to the company, and then it was back to the big cars, to the accountant, to the real estate agent, to the money manager, and always the same conversation, money, percentages, investments, amortizations, and in the evening they drove home exhausted, aggrieved at Hollywood and at a world enslaved into worshipping them, back to their villas, entirely un-American in their whiteness and lying in subtropical flora on their hills, surrounded by high walls, and they weren't especially fine, not as the fans reading the postbox names had hoped; in West Germany every mid-level factory owner, every director and statesman had a bigger house.

Only in the Beverly Hills Hotel did they celebrate the high society Hollywood life so eagerly depicted on the screen. The swimming pool, the terrace of rocking chairs, the bar, the restaurant were ready for business, ready to begin, but again it was only the film city's secret kings, the accountants, the real estate agents, the bankers, a group of managers gathered for a conference, here they arranged the high society of artists, constituting their reality from the model afforded by the shadow plays.

Hollywood lived its most exciting hours after midnight. According to local law, alcohol could no longer be served, the orchestras were silent, the dancers had taken off their makeup, the waiters had made their final calculations, their guests felt unburdened or socially elevated, and then countless little sports cars buzzed and raced through the world's most spread-out village, darting like lit-up insects over the hills and through the valleys, screeching on the boulevards with their overextended brakes, stopping at the big nighttime newsstands with all the major American and European papers, and in a beautiful, well-stocked bookstore, open at night, they met for free literary and arts talk, taking in the newest from Paris, London, Rome, and perhaps from Munich as well. It was the Europeans chased over to Hollywood who were here with their nervous enthusiasm, those from Europe who had become restless Americans, the assistants to the directors, the screenwriters, the gag makers, the second cameramen, the film city's inner emigration meeting up near Genet and Beckett, making plans that Hollywood's bankers would never finance.

At the end of my visit to the empire of shadows I stood, a man on foot, a shipwrecked man, alone on a street still lit by advertisements.

The last night bus had failed to come, the automobiles of the restless and the sleepless whistled happily though mercilessly past me. Finally a taxi appeared and was ready after long negotiation to return me to my downtown Los Angeles hotel. We used a highway streaming with light, to its side stood motel after motel, hostels, and hospices for car drivers. Dreams were also fulfilled in these

buildings, set up like airy summer homes, sporting many lamps, one was in Hollywood, one was breathing in close proximity to the great screen storms, one could drive into bed with the car, but sleep wasn't so desirable, for sleep meant relinquishing one's dear friends, and here an eternal Venetian night beckoned at the film city's edge.

The motels gleamed in the light, the guests sat on terraces and verandas as if on little stages, in courtyards open to the street, beneath garlands of light bulbs, palm fronds, and ripe oranges, and I believe I observed happy nomads, wandering actors acting themselves, and again it was Kafka's America that I saw, it was the big world theater of Oklahoma.